



# A CASE STUDY OF SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH IDIOMS AT SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is prepared with a noble objective to examine syntactic features of English idioms at secondary level students of four different schools (two Assamese medium and two English medium) at Sadiya Sub-Division to explore the capability of them in identifying and writing the meanings of the idioms. The researcher took a total of 120 students on selection basis from four schools. The classes ranged from seventh standard to tenth standard. The sample of the study was such 30 students from class seventh, 30 from class eighth, 30 from class ninth and 30 from tenth standard. All students were randomly selected from each class. The researcher with the help of data collected, tries to present the different levels of understanding in different classes of different schools. The knowledge level of identifying and writing the meanings of the idioms is also shown in ascending way in the case of every class of different schools.

**KEYWORDS:** Idioms, language, learning, syntactic, secondary school level, idiomatic usage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Every language in the world has its own unique collection of phrases and usual sayings. These expressions are generally called idioms and these idioms express some figurative meanings apart from literal meaning. Idioms are very important or essential for everybody who wants their English sound more native like. So, it is a good idea to master the idiomatic expressions. According to Jennifer Seidle & W. McMordie (1), "Idioms are not a separate part of the language, which one can choose either to use or to omit, but they are essential part of the vocabulary of English". Also, he mentioned that "It is important to realize that idioms are not colloquial expressions as many people believe, they appear in formal style and in slang, the language of Shakespeare and Bible". Idioms are influenced by the culture, learning the idioms of a language can be very interesting and enlightening. In our daily life, in order to express ourselves more effectively and clearly, we almost resort to idioms. Idioms and phrases are a poetic part of the English language. People use idioms and phrases to make their language more expressive and more poetic. Idioms are generally used to express the contained meaning therein. Likewise, sometimes idioms and phrases can be very useful in interpreting the meaning compared to the figurative meaning. They make the reader grasp with a poetic touch to the writing. After all, idioms are the amalgamation of words that convey a separate meaning altogether. According to Philip Johnson Laird, 1993, "If natural language had been designed by a logician, Idioms would not exist". "It is difficult to speak spontaneously without lapsing into idiomatic usage". It is also well noticed that idioms have a remarkable role in a foreign language (F.L.) as in the mother tongue (M.T.). The learners of foreign language parallelly learn the vocabulary of the target language, the grammatical structure and idioms with a view to integrating into the culture of the foreign language. Similarly, idioms play an important role for language, reading and social communication, some writers use idioms to "add colour" to their writing. Incorporating idioms into one's is an effective way to make one's work more creative. As English language is rich in idioms. The learners should learn as many idioms as one can learn. According to Ball, "The F.L. student wants to know which idioms to use in a given situation. He also wants to avoid the pitfalls of vulgar, in appropriate and incongruous idioms. In short, he wants both information and guidance. As well as he wants these not only to assist him in speaking English but also in understanding it. It follows, therefore, that some of the idioms he learns will be for use in conversation, others for recognition purposes.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

English language contains at least 25000 idiomatic expressions (Idiomatic Expression 2014). As mentioned above that idioms are a part of the English language and play a pivotal role on holding an essential part of language. As a result of which, many researchers have considered idioms very seriously as well as they have taken up many fruitful studies. English idiomatic expressions are used both in formal and informal communications. It is observed that non-native speakers of English have been noticed unable of using idiomatic expressions. They lack the capability to use idiomatic expressions and to comprehend their meanings fully. This presents a problematic situation in non-native speakers' knowledge and proficiency of the English language and is observed a gap in their language learning process. Similarly, idiomatic expressions are defined as an expression whose meanings are not inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up. On the other hand, it is also defined as a phrase, word or an expression that has a figurative meaning traditionally understood by the native speakers which meaning is different from the literal meaning of the idiom. In other words,

idioms have hidden meaning apart from exact meaning thereof. For example, the idiomatic expression "Lit the sack" has nothing to do with the physical action of hitting the sack with your hand, which is part of your body. The idiom "to hit sack" means "to go sleep". Therefore, an idiomatic expression carries a figurative meaning, rather than a literal one. Another example is "to sell like hot cakes", which also has nothing to do with the actual physical action of selling like hot cakes. What it actually means "to sell like hot cakes" is to "sell quickly like hot cakes". So, if something sells like hot cakes it sells fast. As a result, idiomatic expressions in linguistics are said to be figures of speech.

Thus, for example, the idiomatic expression "to go to the dogs" means to become ruined or to change to a much worse condition. The idiomatic expression "to attend at the eleventh hour" means to be at the last possible moment for doing something. Another example of an idiomatic expression and how it carries a whole meaning that is different from the literal meaning of its parts is, "it is raining cats and dogs" which means that it is raining heavily.

In linguistics, idiomatic expressions carry arbitrary meanings also. It means what they mean other than coincidence. However, it is found by recent research that many idioms are explainable and carry non-arbitrary meanings. Recent research tells us that idioms are non-arbitrary features of a language. Idioms can, without memorizing them by heart, be taught in a systematic way. In which/such a way, idiomatic expressions become much easier to understand and remember. Also, idiomatic expressions are used in formal and informal speech. They are part of the standard business, media and everyday life, talking about written or spoken English. Thus, non-native speakers of English should learn idiomatic expressions in order to be able to communicate effectively and sound more natural and native like. It could be said that the more a non-native speaker is capable of understanding and using idiomatic expressions, the closer he or she is to the native proficiency of the English language (Teaching Idiomatic Expressions, 2015).

Furthermore, idiomatic expressions are found to be culture based. That is, idiomatic expressions carry within them the history, heritage, culture and customs of its native users (Rizq, W., 2015). It can be said that idioms that are derived from physical human experiences are, in general, culturally equal. That is, idioms that are based on physical human experiences, such as anger being associated with heat are easier to recognize and understand by non-natives. Due to the strong similarities across different cultures in basic physical experiences such as being sick or well, hot or cold, idioms that are derived from such images are often the same and fairly easy to understand (Boers, 2008). However, idioms that are derived from specific domains are usually different across cultures, because these domains are not equally important across cultures. For instance, many idiomatic expressions in the English language are derived from seafaring country. English language, for example, has many idioms such as "neck and neck" meaning "it is hard to say who will win", "win hands down" meaning "to win easily", and "go off the rails" meaning "to go wrong or out of control". These three idioms are derived from horse racing due to the popularity of horse racing as a sport in England. So, as mentioned, specific domains are not equally shared and are not equally important across cultures. As such, idioms derived from such domains are more difficult to realize and understand by non-native speakers of the English language. Unlike idioms derived from physical experiences which are universal. It has been found that idiomatic expressions that are derived from specific domains may not be cul-

turally shared and therefore harder to grasp and understand (Ibid).

Thus, learning idiomatic expressions also teaches non-native speakers of a language the culture of its people (Ovando and Collier, 1985). As a result, the more the learner of English is aware of idioms and their meanings, the better knowledge that learner carries of the English culture.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This case study has basically aimed to examine some students of secondary level from two (2) English medium schools and two (2) Assamese medium schools of Sadiya Sub-Division, Tinsukia, Assam. The students were from Sadiya Govt. H.S. School, Chapakhowa Town High School, Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya and Sunrise Academy. The researcher took the students from standard seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth respectively. Through this study, the capability of the secondary level students of above-mentioned schools was observed and listed to ascertain how far they are able to identify and know the meanings of idioms. All students were given class regarding idioms and its usage very carefully.

In the study a total of 120 students of secondary level students were taken from four (4) schools, two (2) Assamese medium and two (2) English medium schools situated in Sadiya. The students for the study were taken very randomly from each and every class such as 30 from standard seventh, 30 from standard eighth, 30 from standard ninth and 30 from standard tenth.

Some questionnaires containing different types of sentences related to idioms that are being used in day-to-day life were distributed among the students. The questionnaires were prepared differently for different classes. Same questionnaire was not offered to all classes. As per guidance of the supervisor utmost effort and sincerity was followed with a view to measuring the actual degree of knowledge in the field of idioms. Even after giving some common idioms, the researcher chose some idioms or sentences from this site [www.idiomconnection.com](http://www.idiomconnection.com) for maintaining the standard.

After the classes, the questionnaires were distributed among the students of each class and they were asked to identify the idioms by reading attentively as well as write the meanings of the idioms. Strictness was followed but sufficient time was given to complete the test. At the end of the test, the researcher analyzed and showed the result or data of the students in each school along with the data analysis and percentage for the correct answers and incorrect answers of each and every school. Moreover, the researcher provided complete data and information about the study preparing four (4) tables separately for four (4) schools.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

This chapter shows the findings for all students of each school and also discusses the actual findings in their answers of the questionnaires. A few tables are used for all students of each and every school for getting the results for each class. Afterwards, comparison was also made among the students of each class as well as among the students of each school. Similarly, each table shows the level of the students of 4 classes then overall correct answers, incorrect answers, percentage of correct answers for each class, percentage of incorrect answers for each class and the total as well.

The students of vernacular medium school are not able to show the expected correct use of idiom in lower classes as compared to the students of English medium school. They can identify the idiom in the sentences but are not able to write the meaning correctly. It is shown in the tables very distinctly. Generally, "correct answers" are the correct usage of idioms in each class on the contrary, incorrect answers showed the wrong usage of each class. Likewise, the percentage of correct answers denotes "the percentage of the correct answers" in each class, whereas, "the percentage of incorrect answers" means the total percentage of incorrect answers of the students in each class. At the end, the researcher showed the total number of correct answers, incorrect answers, total percentage of correct and incorrect answers of all students separately. Discussion was also done very minutely so that everything targeted might be displayed well and genuinely.

#### 4.1. Investigation of Sadiya Govt. H.S. School students:

The researcher provided/set the first data of students from Sadiya Govt. H.S. School. The classes were seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth. The researcher first investigated standard seventh and found that students were not well acquainted with idioms for which they showed their little knowledge in the case of idioms. Very distinctly, they faced difficulty in identifying and writing the meanings of the idioms. As a result of which, all answers were not given correctly. For example, one student got 15 out of 30 which was the highest score. The lowest score of students was 11 out of 30. The percentage of correct answers was 49.4% whereas incorrect answers was 50.6%.

Again, according to the data of eighth class, the students had little more knowledge in comparison with that of standard seventh about the idioms. The scores of the students were almost same. The highest score was 17 out of 30. They also did not have much knowledge in identifying and knowing the meaning of the idioms in the questionnaire. The highest score of the students of Sadiya Govt. H.S. School was 17 out of 30 but the lowest score of one student was 13 out of 30. A little progress was observed as per the data. So, the percentage of correct answers was 53.4% as well as the percentage of incorrect answers was 46.6%.

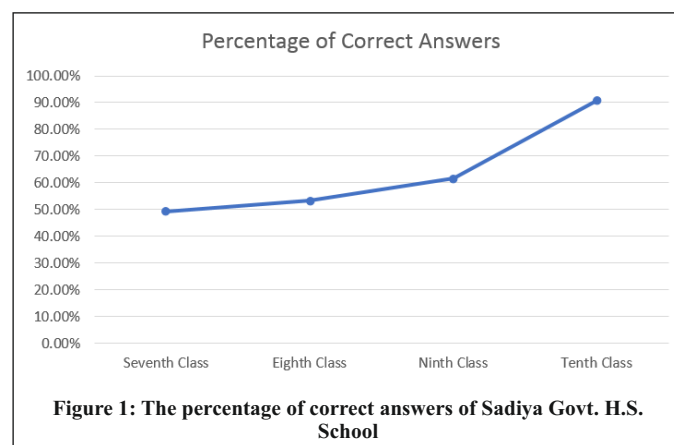
Next, the knowledge of the students in identifying the idioms and writing the meanings thereof was noticed in an ascending way by the researcher in class ninth of the same school. In the investigation or study, the students showed satisfactory performance. The highest score was 25 out of 30, whereas, the lowest score of the students was 22 out of 30. In this particular standard, most of the students could identify the idioms and knew meanings of the idioms as well. Only a few students could not identify and did not know meanings of the idioms in the study. The correct answers were 285 and incorrect answers 65. The percentage of correct answers was 78.4% and the percentage of incorrect answers showed 21.6%.

The students of standard tenth of the aforementioned school showed good and creditable knowledge about idioms. They could identify the idioms and knew meanings of the idioms in a believable way. 272 out of 300 questions were correct whereas only 28 were incorrect in the study. The highest score of one of the students was 28 out of 30. Likewise, the lowest score was 08 out of 30. The percentage of correct answers was 90.6% while the percentage of incorrect answers was 9.4% only.

According to these findings and the data collected from aforementioned school, the students of standard tenth are senior students to the students of standard seventh, eighth and ninth. The researcher can say that the students of class tenth were much better than that of ninth, eighth and seventh standard in identifying and giving the meanings of the idioms. The following table or graphical representation (figure 1) shows the perceptible and distinguishable results.

**Table 1: Description of the Results of Sadiya Govt. H.S. School**

Students Level	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	Percentage of Correct Answers	Percentage of Incorrect Answers
Seventh Class	148	152	49.4%	50.6%
Eighth Class	160	140	53.4%	46.6%
Ninth Class	185	115	61.6%	38.4%
Tenth Class	272	28	90.6%	9.4%
Total	765	435	63.7%	36.25%



**Figure 1: The percentage of correct answers of Sadiya Govt. H.S. School**

#### 4.2. Investigation of Chapakhowa Town High School:

The researcher very sincerely ran a study among the students of different classes of Chapakhowa Town High School. The data was collected from class seventh. According to the study, in seventh standard the highest score was 13.5 out of 30, whereas, the lowest score was 9.5 out of 30. The number of correct answers of the students in class seventh was 145, whereas, the number of incorrect answers was 155. The students were very raw in identifying and writing the meanings of the idioms. Many classes were required for their sufficient knowledge for idioms. The percentage of correct answers was 48.3%, while the percentage of incorrect answers was 51.7%. In the case of eighth standard, the answers of the students were almost same with that of seventh standard. A little difference was distinguished between the two classes. The highest score was 14.5 out of 30, whereas, the lowest score was 10 out of 30. The percentage of correct answers was 49% while the percentage of incorrect answers was 51%. The numbers of correct answers and incorrect answers were 147 and 153 respectively.

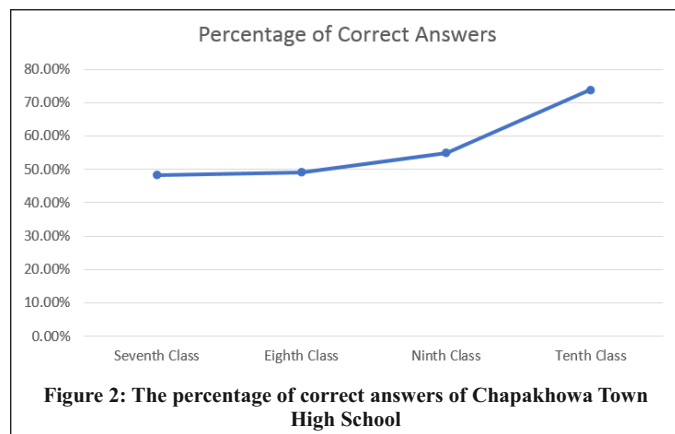
Next, the researcher observed the degree of knowledge very minutely in class ninth. The students had better knowledge than that of seventh and eighth standard. The highest score was 22.5 out of 30 but the lowest score was 16 out of 30. The percentage of correct answers was 55%, whereas, the percentage of incorrect answers was 45%.

Lastly, the researcher went to explore the periphery of knowledge in the field of idioms and their meanings. It was marked that the students of tenth standard were the best. The highest score was 26 out of 30 and the lowest score was 22 out of 30. The percentage of correct answers was 74%. Likewise, the percentage of incor-

rect answers was 26%. The following graphical representation (Figure 2) shows the more easily distinguishable results.

**Table 2: Description of the Results of Chapakhowa Town High School**

Students Level	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	Percentage of Correct Answers	Percentage of Incorrect Answers
Seventh Class	145	155	48.3%	51.7%
Eighth Class	147	153	49%	51%
Ninth Class	165	135	55%	45%
Tenth Class	222	78	74%	26%
Total	679	521	56.58%	43.42%



**Figure 2: The percentage of correct answers of Chapakhowa Town High School**

#### 4.3. Investigation of Sunrise Academy:

The data was collected from 5 No. Shantipur Sunrise Academy. As per data, it may be mentioned that the highest score of the students was 26 out of 30 and the lowest score of the students was 14 out of 30. Students were able to answer 165 out of 300 as correct answers as well as total 135 questions were answered as incorrect answers in class seventh. It can significantly be mentioned that the percentage of correct answers was 55% and the percentage of incorrect answers was 45%. All students were partly able to identify and write the meanings of idioms in the case study.

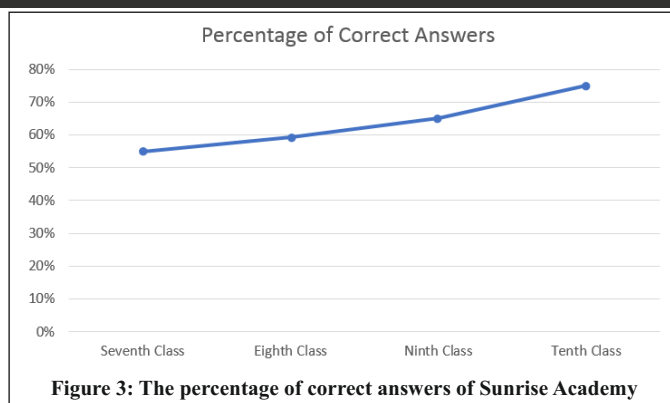
Accordingly, the researcher took the data from class eighth by investigating the students properly. Total 178 questions were answered as correct answers, on the other hand, only 122 questions were answered as incorrect answers. The actual percentage of correct answers was 59.3% while the percentage of incorrect answers was 40.7%. The highest score of the students was 25 out of 30 but the lowest score of the students was 18 out of 30.

After eighth standard, the researcher proceeded to class ninth. The students of class ninth could identify and write the meanings of the idioms more than seventh and eighth class. The scores were also noticeable. The highest score was 26.5 out of 30 and the lowest score was 10 out of 30. The total of correct answers was 195 out of 300 and the percentage of correct answers was 65% while the percentage of incorrect answers was 35%.

In class tenth, the performance of the students was excellent. Almost from 70 to 80 percent students were able to identify and pen the meanings of the idioms of the questionnaire excellently. The highest score of the students was 28 out of 30 and the lowest score was 21 out of 30. The total of 225 correct answers were detected and its percentage was 75%. Similarly, the percentage of incorrect answers was 25%. In comparison with the students of vernacular medium school the students of English medium school were able to show their brilliancy or advancement of knowledge. In the students' level, the total of percentage of correct answers was 63.58%.

**Table 3: Description of the Results of Sunrise Academy**

Students Level	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	Percentage of Correct Answers	Percentage of Incorrect Answers
Seventh Class	165	135	55%	45%
Eighth Class	178	122	59.3%	40.7%
Ninth Class	195	105	65%	35%
Tenth Class	225	75	75%	25%
Total	763	437	63.58%	36.42%



**Figure 3: The percentage of correct answers of Sunrise Academy**

#### 4.4. Investigation of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya:

The researcher tried to explore the knowledge of the students of 1 No. Shantipur Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya. According to data, the students of class seventh could not identify and pen the meaning of the idioms correctly. The researcher realized one thing that the students had little knowledge about idioms. As a result of which, they did not answer all the questions of the questionnaire. The highest score of the students was 18 out of 30 and the lowest score was 11 out of 30. The total of correct and incorrect answers was 155 and 145 out of 300. The percentage of correct answers was 51.6% and the percentage of incorrect answers was 48.4%.

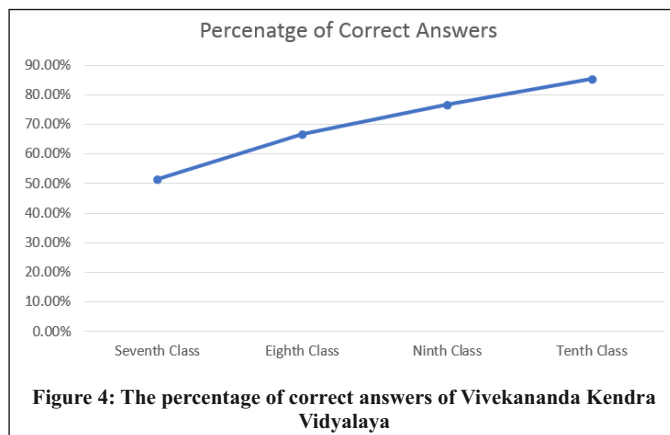
But comparatively the students of class eighth were little more advanced than that of class seventh. In the eyes of the researcher, the students did well a lot in the study. The highest score of the students was 27 out of 30 as well as the lowest score was 24 out of 30. The percentage of correct answers was 66.6% and the percentage of incorrect answers was 33.4%.

The students of the ninth class of the same school had knowledge in ascending way about the idioms. The data mentioned in the table reflects the real picture of the study. The students were able to give 230 correct answers out of 300 which is excellent. Likewise, the percentage of correct answers was 76.6%, whereas, the percentage of incorrect answers was 23.4%. The highest score of the students was 28 out of 30 and the lowest score was 24 out of 30.

Lastly, the researcher collected the data from the investigation run among the students of class tenth of 1 No. Shantipur Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya. The students of class tenth were extraordinarily brilliant and advanced. The highest score of the students was 29 out of 30, only one score was not gained. Also, the lowest score was 26 out of 30. The students were able to give 256 answers as correct ones that is very appreciable. The percentage of correct answers was 85.3%, whereas, the percentage of incorrect answers was 14.7%.

**Table 4: Description of the Results of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya**

Students Level	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	Percentage of Correct Answers	Percentage of Incorrect Answers
Seventh Class	155	145	51.6%	48.4%
Eighth Class	200	100	66.6%	33.4%
Ninth Class	230	70	76.6%	23.4%
Tenth Class	256	44	85.3%	14.7%
Total	841	359	70.08%	29.92%



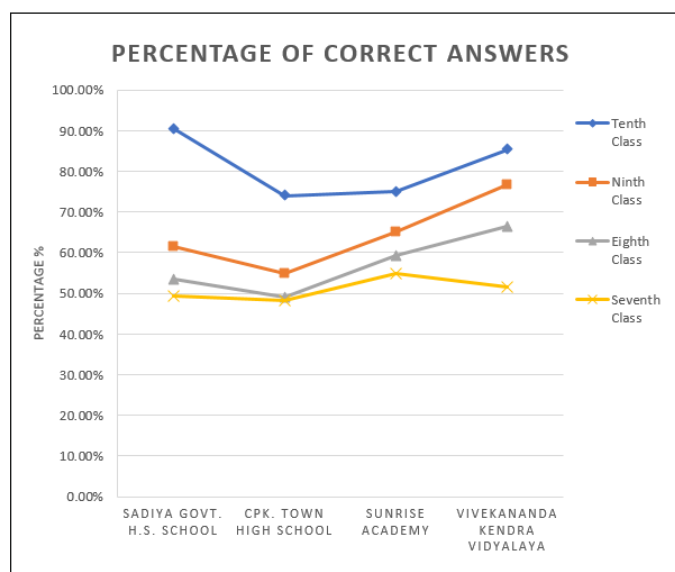
**Figure 4: The percentage of correct answers of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya**

#### 5. ANALYSIS:

In the analytical section, it must be acknowledged that in this study the researcher has examined the syntactic features of English idioms at four secondary level

schools through a syntactic study of idioms. The researcher took four classes from seventh-tenth in every school. The researcher has undoubtedly beheld some obstacles confronted by the students in identifying and penning the meanings of the idioms. Though the problems and hindrances are lessening gradually towards the upper classes, the students generally face maximum hindrances in the lower standards such as seventh, eighth standard. But in standards like ninth and tenth up-to-the-mark understanding and analysis are displayed in identifying and writing the meanings of the idioms.

It is true that researcher has experienced the changes occurred in different school levels. Different types of percentage of the correct answers have been shown in accordance with data. Of course, increase of the percentage of correct answers has been observed as per the grades. It might, for example, be mentioned that the percentage of correct answers of seventh class in Sadiya Govt H.S. School is 49.4%. Likewise, the percentage of Sunrise Academy is 55% and Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya is 51.6%. Again, the percentage level of class eighth varies from that of class ninth in each and every school. The percentage of correct answers of Sadiya Govt. H.S. School was 53.4%, Chapakhova Town High School was 49%, Sunrise Academy was 59% and Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya was 66.6%.



This way, the more we see the percentage of upper classes, the more we notice more percentage in each class. The researcher happens to view the percentage as 61.6%, 55%, 65% and 76.6% for Sadiya Govt. H.S. School, Chapakhova Town High School, Sunrise Academy and Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya respectively. Of all the classes, the percentage of correct answers in class tenth in every school has topped. The percentage of correct answers in Sadiya Govt. H.S. School was 90.6%. The percentage of Chapakhova Town High School was 74%, in Sunrise Academy was 75% and in Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya was 85.3%.

The researcher has showed the data of four schools. Three schools follow the SEBA curriculum and one school follow CBSE curriculum. The same process was followed in case of the four schools. More or less, the same result was found and it was showed with reference to Table 1, 2, 3 & 4. The researcher has ensured one thing that the ability of identifying and writing the meanings of the idioms certainly depends on the knowledge level that is proved with the help of the data collected from four different schools of secondary level. It was also observed by the researcher that all teachers were not equally successful in offering quality education in every school mainly in inculcating some grammatical matters like idioms, phrases, syntax, pronunciation, spelling etc. The essential requirement of teachers might not be noticed in all schools. As a result of which, the output of four schools showed varied results.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS:

Idioms appear in all languages prevailing in the world. Having more knowledge in idioms means having more familiarity with English. Idioms can help improve one's conversational skills because it shows native speakers that one understands the cultural meaning and context behind the idiom one is using. Everybody should increase the number of vocabulary and that are to be used in practical field of day-to-day life. People have to use different types of idioms in different situations faced by them. Generally, the students get innumerable idioms while reading a book at home or at library. Each and everybody must note down all the unfamiliar idioms, phrases and words and that are to be inculcated well and exercised in practical life. English learning students must be provided themselves with currently needed learning aids at the age of internet. If the internet is browsed concentratedly, it will be very beneficial and interesting for all learners. As because, the internet facility, now-a-days, makes the journey of learning much more pleasing and encouraging.

At the end, it must be suggested that utmost effort must be kept towards higher English level. The teachers concerned and the learners must be equally interested. The teachers must get trained to frame activities according to the need of the allotted class. The researcher is of the opinion that keen observation by the teacher should be made with a view to inculcating the need towards the students so that they might be successful in reaching the target in their life.

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